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ABSTRACT

A study evaluated the longitudinal effect of a planned in-school practicum experience addressing cultural diversity on the self-perception of student teachers regarding their interpersonal competence in such situations. Subjects were 18 student teachers of agricultural education and 6 student teachers of family and consumer science enrolled in the University of Nebraska's College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and College of Human Resources and Family Sciences, respectively. Evaluation was accomplished through the administration of a multicultural attitudinal inventory to all subjects prior to, immediately after, and at least 1 year after the experience. Subscale evaluation included the areas of teaching skills, knowledge of cultural diversity, teacher-student relationships, and cultural awareness. Perceptual change of interpersonal competency occurred within subjects in all subscale areas measured. The area of greatest gain was teacher-student relationships. The area of least gain and most regression over time was cultural awareness. (Contains 13 references) (Author/YLB)

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A LONGITUDINAL MEASURE OF THE PERCEPTUAL IMPACT OF A CULTURAL DIVERSITY TEACHING PRACTICUM ON THE INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCY OF STUDENT TEACHERS

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A LONGITUDINAL MEASURE OF THE PERCEPTUAL IMPACT OF A CULTURAL DIVERSITY TEACHING PRACTICUM ON THE INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCY OF STUDENT TEACHERS

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the longitudinal effect of a planned in-school practicum experience addressing cultural diversity on the self perception of student teachers regarding their interpersonal competency in such situations. Subjects of the study were eighteen student teachers of agricultural education and six student teachers of family and consumer science enrolled in the Colleges of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, and Human Resources and Family Sciences respectively. Evaluation was accomplished through the administration of a multi-cultural attitudinal inventory to all subjects prior to, immediately after, and at least one year after the experience. Subscale evaluation included the areas of teaching skills, knowledge of cultural diversity, teacher-student relationships, and cultural awareness. Findings of the study indicated perceptual change of interpersonal competency occurred within subjects in all subscale areas measured. The area of greatest gain was teacher-student relationships. The area of least gain, and regression over time was cultural awareness.

Introduction/Theoretical Framework

"The rapid change in the ethnic demographics of the United States has made diversity one of the most significant social facts of this society. No longer is the occasion for an inter-cultural encounter most likely when one leaves ones' own country" (Avery,1992, p.3). As of 1992, over 50% of the enrollment in 50 of the largest 99 school districts in the United States was comprised by students of color. These districts comprise 23% of the total student population in the United States (Nieto, 1996, pp.12&13). It is a challenge for schools to help youth from diverse cultures

and groups to attain the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to function effectively in the 21st century.

"Teachers play a key role in implementing multi-cultural education and helping students develop democratic racial attitudes and behaviors. Because they bring their own cultural perspectives, values, hopes, and dreams to the classroom, they are in a position to strongly influence the views, conceptions, and behaviors of students" (Banks, 1995, p. 333). Banks (1994, pp. 47-52) identifies four categories of knowledge in which teachers require a solid background in order to acquire attitudes, perceptions and behavior necessary to actualize multi-cultural education in schools. Those categories are (1) a knowledge of major paradigms in multi-cultural education; (2) a knowledge of the major concepts in multi-cultural education; (3) a historical and cultural knowledge of major ethnic groups; and (4) a pedagogical knowledge about how to adapt curriculum and instruction to unique needs of students from diverse cultural, ethnic, and/or social class groups. "If teachers are to work successfully with students from cultures different from their own, it is imperative that their training program provide for more than intellectualization about cross-cultural issues. Teacher growth in this area is possible only to the extent that the teacher's own behavior in a cross-cultural setting is the subject of examination and experimentation" (Hillard's chapter cited in Zeichner, 1995).

> "Probably the most frequently cited topic of discussion in the teacher education for diversity literature is the provision of some type of field experience to help sensitize prospective teachers to cultural differences and/or to help them become more capable cross-cultural teachers. A variety of typologies for staff development and several comprehensive

lists of what are claimed to be research-based effective staff development strategies are offered in the staff development for diversity literature. However, there is little evidence that any of the staff development for diversity reported in this literature has been effective over the long term in producing anything more than surface-level changes in teachers or their teaching practices. As in preservice teacher education for diversity, what little success has been demonstrated seems to be closely linked with cultural immersion experiences" (Zeichner, 1995, pp. 407-413).

Individual sensitization to cultural difference and/or appreciation of cultural diversity involves the consideration of behavioral change. Rokeach (1968) states that behavior is a function of two interacting attitudes. One is attitude focused on an object (cultural diversity), and the other is attitude being focused on the situation (treatment by cultural immersion). Behavior is an expression of attitude as differentially manifested along a range of values in relation to the specific interaction of the object(s) and the situation(s).

"Theories of attitude change seem to be generally unconcerned with whether an expressed behavior change does or does not represent an underlying attitude change. Indeed, the classical paradigm employed in experimental studies of behavior change - pre-test, treatment, post-test - is not capable of telling us whether an expressed behavior change indicates an attitude change; it can only tell us whether an expression of behavior has or has not changed as a result of a particular experimental treatment" (Rokeach, 1968 p. 140). "But, the more post-test situations in which a changed opinion is manifested, the more confident we may be that a change in attitude has actually taken place. Any experimental study of expressed opinion change, if to qualify as

a study in attitude change, should demonstrate the existence of change in at least two reasonably different situations" (Rokeach, 1968 p. 148).

In 1993, Bell reported research results on a multi-cultural teaching field experience conducted at the University of Nebraska with student teachers of agricultural education and consumer science. In that research, student teacher perception was inventoried prior to and immediately following the field experience regarding behavioral teaching skills, cultural awareness, knowledge about cultural diversity, and student-teacher relationships. Those results reported perceptual interpersonal change in all of the areas in which the student teachers were inventoried. A recommendation of the study was to conduct a longitudinal follow-up of the participants to measure the longer term effects after at least one year on the interpersonal competency of the participants.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the longitudinal effect of a planned practicum experience addressing cultural diversity on the self perception of student teachers regarding their interpersonal competency in such situations.

The objective of the research was to compare the longitudinal effect of the practicum experience to the measured differences obtained prior to and immediately after the experience in student teacher perception regarding: (1) behavioral proficiencies gained through teaching in a culturally diverse setting; (2) affective awareness of ones own culture and of differences in cultural values and biases; (3) cognitive understanding of theory, research and cross paradigmatic approaches to cultural diversity, and; (4) individual rights and the personal dignity of culturally diverse students in the teaching relationship.

Procedures

This study was a pre-experimental, one group, pre-test post-test design. In this design the effects of the treatment are judged by the difference between the pre-test and the post-test scores. No comparison with a control group or its equivalence is provided (Best, 1981).

The subjects of this study were all student teachers of agricultural education enrolled in the fall semesters of 1991 (n=10) and 1992 (n=8) in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and all student teachers of home economics education enrolled in the fall semester of 1992 (n=6) in the College of Human Resources and Family Sciences at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. In the 1991 group of agricultural education subjects, two students chose to drop out of the experience. Of the remaining subjects, the post experience data on one individual was found to be missing, therefore, the reportable population was n=21. All 21 participants were included in the 1994 longitudinal data gathering, at which time, at least one year had elapsed since the practicum experience.

The original treatment was a six day, forty-five hour practicum experience at Flanagan High School in Omaha, Nebraska. Flanagan is an alternative high school maintaining a student population that is 85% African-American, 14% Eurocentric and 1% Hispanic (M. Tate, personal communication, December 1993). The experience included daily debriefing sessions, teacher shadowing activities, actual teaching experiences and issue oriented seminars. Prior to, and immediately after the experience, each student teacher completed a 32 item, multi-cultural attitudinal inventory. This same inventory was administered to the participants in 1994 to measure the longitudinal effect of the experience on their interpersonal competency in culturally

diverse situations. The inventory was adapted for educational use from the larger 43 item Multi-cultural Counseling Inventory (MCI) developed by Sodowsky, Taffe, Gutkin and Wise (1993). Adaptation of the inventory was completed by the researcher and Sodowsky. The inventory was reviewed for face and content validity by a panel of agricultural education and consumer science faculty members. The MCI author and panel judged the instrument to be valid. To assess student teacher perception, inventory responses were requested on a four-point Likert scale (1=very inaccurate, 2=somewhat inaccurate, 3=somewhat accurate, 4=very accurate) for each item. An example item to which student teachers rated their perception was, "I form effective learning relationships with minority students."

Within the inventory were four subscales: behavioral teaching skills, cultural awareness, knowledge about cultural diversity and student-teacher relationships. "Behavioral teaching skills" includes such competencies as recognition and ability to recover from cultural mistakes, effective self monitoring, and modifying teaching techniques to accommodate minority learner needs. "Cultural awareness" focuses in the affective domain and encompasses the educator's attitude toward their own culture, pro-active multi-cultural sensitivity and responsiveness, multi-cultural interactions and life experiences, advocacy within institutions, and enjoyment of multi-culturalism. "Knowledge about cultural diversity" covers the cognitive domain involving theory, research and cross paradigmatic approaches to understanding cultural diversity. "Student-teacher relationships" is based upon trust, absence of stereotyping, and comfort in a new, more diverse relationship. Internal consistency reliability (Cronbach alphas) for the inventory is reported in Table 1.

In addition to the MCI data, demographic employment information was collected during

the follow up on the participants. This data categorized their current employment and tenure in that position, and whether their employment organization had provided experiences which had further enhanced their understanding of cultural diversity. Of the 21 responding participants, 2 failed to complete the demographic information section. Demographic related information reported is based on the 19 usable responses.

Insert Table 1 here

Analysis of the Data

The parameters of the population studied were derived using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS-X). Means and standard deviations were calculated for each subscale of items on the inventory.

Results

As indicated by the data reported in Table 2, perceptual change of interpersonal competency occurred within participants in all subscale areas measured in the follow-up.

Of the 19 respondents completing the demographic portion of the survey 12 were presently involved in secondary education, 2 were farming or ranching, 2 were involved in agribusiness sales, and the other 3 were a government employee, hospital administrator and social service agency employee. Nine of the respondents had received an opportunity provided by their current employer to enhance their understanding of cultural diversity.

Insert Table 2 here

Conclusions and/or Recommendations

Because of the design used in this study, the results can be generalized to only the participants involved. With this limitation in mind, the following conclusions and recommendations are provided.

Through the results of this follow-up procedure it is evident that behavioral change has occurred in the participants, as it relates to multi-culturalism, in the areas of teaching skills, knowledge of cultural diversity, and teacher-student relationships.

The greatest gain in self perceived interpersonal competency by participants was in the area of teacher-student relationships. This area focused on the participants' interactional process with minority clients/students regarding trustworthiness, comfort level, stereotypes of minority populations, and general world-view of multi-culturalism. During the practicum experience this was an area in which the participants' scores decreased. It was the researcher's conclusion that the decrease was due to participants becoming aware of their unconscious bias. Vance (1982) describes this awareness as conscious incompetence. When individuals become aware of an inconsistency, in this case bias, they make a decision of whether to change their attitude and/or behavior regarding the issue. Should they decide to change Vance describes their new stage as conscious competence. Should they approve of this new behavior to the extent of accepting it into their affective behavior, Vance describes this stage as unconscious competence. At the time of the follow-up, participants were engaged in career situations requiring practice and self

monitoring of these interpersonal relationship skills. In the demographic information, participants reported that their employers had provided them with experiences such as training sessions and routine interaction with minority clientele to further enhance their understanding of cultural diversity.

The subscales of student-teacher relationship and behavioral teaching skills while distinctly different share the common element of student interaction. The subscale of behavioral teaching skills includes participant ability to recognize and recover from cultural mistakes, use of non-traditional methods of assessment, and participant self monitoring. All of these competencies are involved in effective interpersonal relationships. Confidence in self perceived competency is developed from situational use in their careers and inservice provided by employers.

The subscale of knowledge about cultural diversity measured the participant ability to conceptualize culturally relevant lesson planning and assessment strategies, familiarity with cultural information and awareness of multi-cultural teaching research. The follow-up score has regressed from the score reported on the post-test. To evaluate this regression would require another follow-up to assess if the score continues to decline over time. Based on the content of this subscale and the similar focused knowledge intent of the practicum seminars, it may not be surprising that the score immediately following the practicum would be higher.

In this research, the mean score for awareness has always been the lowest of the subscales. The follow-up score has regressed since the post-test, but continues to be above the initial pre-test score. This subscale focuses on the affective domain and encompasses the educator's attitude toward their own culture, proactive multi-cultural sensitivity and

responsiveness, multi-cultural interactions and life experiences, advocacy, and enjoyment of multi-culturalism. Affective behavior is largely influenced by ones' own culture, life experiences and selected significant others (Hanna, 1995). These are the very ingredients through which individuals clarify values upon which they base personal decision making. In relation to Rokeach's (1968) theory on behavior and attitude, the relative stasis attained throughout the research period by participants on cultural awareness may indicate little change in attitude toward multi-culturalism as a separate personal value. However, behavioral change of attitude has been expressed through situations when interacting in client/student-teacher relationships, demonstrating adaptive teaching behavior, or making use of knowledge regarding cultural diversity. It is recommended initially that preservice and inservice activities for teachers regarding cultural diversity focus on situational knowledge content and its application rather than the affective change of teacher's personal values. The knowledge content recommended by Banks (1994, pp. 47-52) is (1) a knowledge of major paradigms in multi- cultural education; (2) a knowledge of the major concepts in multi-cultural education; (3) a historical and cultural knowledge of major ethnic groups; and (4) a pedagogical knowledge about how to adapt curriculum and instruction to unique needs of students from diverse cultural, ethnic, and/or social class groups. The process of affective teacher attitude change is a slow process marked by the time it takes to move through the stages of awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and adoption. It may require a series of situational changes related to teaching behavior or student-teacher relationships in order for teachers to consider a change or addition to their affective awareness regarding cultural diversity. If attitude change is to occur in teachers it will do so as a result of satisfaction from the change. This will involve the need for an environment in which the change

seems logical, and the satisfaction is real and elicits sincere praise and reinforcement (Ruud, 1971). To establish an environment of satisfaction for teacher performance, it is recommended that those in position to do so create meaningful opportunities for multi-cultural experiences within the school curriculum. It is further recommended that a portion of the reinforcement for teacher behavioral change be linked to meaningful multi-cultural inservice activities and opportunities such as (Lynch, 1995):

1. More cooperative modes of education ..... yielding students who are less competitive and can work with, live with and tolerate others.
2. Youth groups and exchange agencies ..... can have a powerful socializing influence on young people.
3. Holistic institutional policies ..... are needed to make inter-ethnic contact purposeful and successful, whether in school or youth organizations.
4. Strategies regarding how teachers teach and what they teach ..... should be designed to make a positive difference in the inter-ethnic relations of students.
5. The learning of foreign language ..... provides students with insight into other cultures, and a more detached view of their own culture.
6. Opportunities to facilitate the transition of students from school to work ..... can minimize the perils of unemployment and better promote youth socialization.

It is recommended that colleges and universities with the mission of preparing teachers continue to provide students with multi-cultural experiences both of a formal and informal nature. The college experience is a great socializing influence. Even though 23% of the nation's total student population is enrolled in culturally diverse schools (Nieto, 1996), for much of the

remaining 77% it may be the first opportunity to live in and socialize with others from a culture different than their own. Colleges and universities should promote this opportunity to enhance diversity involvement of their students. Considerations for this promotion should be: (1) equal representation of minority populations in faculty and administrative positions, (2) required participation in volunteer activities within the greater university community, (3) required course work addressing diversity, (4) encouragement for student organizations to address diversity issues in their annual programs of activity, (5) encouragement of teaching faculty to integrate the method of cooperative learning into their delivery of instruction, and (6) assignment of personnel for the specific purpose of recruiting minority populations and the facilitation of financial aid and assimilation to the university community. There are many considerations in addition to these, but the primary focus is to provide students with an increased number of situations in which to evaluate their attitudes regarding diversity. Within university departments, there is the opportunity to shape these situations to uniquely address specific missions. It is recommended that in a department preparing teachers those situations be guided by the four categories of knowledge recommended by Banks (1994, pp. 47-52) identified earlier in this report. Such learning activities will set the stage for local school districts by providing teachers prepared to proceed with purposeful applications of multi- cultural education in their own curriculum.

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Table 1

Internal Reliability for the Modified MCI (Cronbach alpha)

Subscale	Pre-test	Post-test	Follow-up
All	.82	.85	.89
Skills	.56	.74	.62
Awareness	.75	.76	.86
Knowledge	.85	.72	.84
Relationship	.46	.58	.64

Table 2

Comparison of Pre, Post and Follow-up Multi-cultural Inventory Subscale Mean Scores (N=21)

Subscale	Pre	SD	Post	SD	Follow-up	SD
Skills	3.12	.41	3.27	.44	3.31	.38
Awareness	2.20	.46	2.48	.50	2.30	.61
Knowledge	2.86	.51	3.24	.41	3.02	.55
Relationship	2.95	.41	2.82	.53	3.29	.46

Note. Means based on a scale in which 1=poor multi-cultural competence, 2=fair multi-cultural competence, 3=good multi-cultural competence, and 4=strong multi-cultural competence.